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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA: INFORMATION ON CHILD/FORCED LABOR IN THE
PRODUCTION OF GOODS

REF: STATE 043120

SUMMARY

¶1. The following is information on forced labor and
exploitative child labor in the production of goods in
Colombia, as requested per reftel. Post obtained the
information from Colombian government agencies, human rights
groups, and the International Labor Organization (ILO) for
use in preparing a list of goods produced with child labor,
forced labor, or forced child labor, as mandated by the
Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2005.
Copies of source materials will be sent separately per
reftel. Colombia's agricultural and mining sectors do not
appear to have significant child labor issues, but a lack of
solid data indicates further research may be warranted. END
SUMMARY

COFFEE, SUGAR CANE, BANANAS AND PLANTAINS

¶2. Type: Exploitative child labor
Source/year of information: National Administrative
Department of Statistics (DANE - 2005), ILO/IPEC
Representative in Colombia (2008), Colombian Human Rights
Ombudsman (2006)

¶3. Description: DANE reports that 393,058 children work in
the agricultural sector in Colombia, the majority of whom
work on illicit crops. The Colombian Human Rights Ombudsman
reports that 200,000 children work in the cultivation of
illegal coca. National Coordinator for the International
Program to Eliminate Child Labor (IPEC/ILO) Liliana Obregon
says that in rural areas it is difficult to determine how
many children work in the informal agricultural sector. She
says that in rural areas, and especially in
indigenous-dominated areas of Colombia, it is culturally
acceptable for children to help their families cultivate
agricultural products such as coffee, sugar cane, bananas,
and plantains. Obregon tells us there is no evidence of
significant use of child labor in the formal agricultural
sector; the large-scale plantations, which produce about 99%
of Colombia's agricultural exports, are inspected frequently.

¶4. Obregon says the coffee sector merits additional study.
She notes there is a special program operated by the Ministry
of Education in some rural areas called "new school" that

offers education to students at early or late hours in the day, allowing them to help with the coffee harvest and still study. She says that although the intention is good (keeping children in school), this system often allows children to continue to work illegally. Obregon adds that because coffee beans need to be hand picked, this sector could be particularly susceptible to child labor. She notes that Colombian law allows for children over 15 to work (for limited hours) with proper permits. Still, only 20,000 Colombian children have obtained the permits, leaving many in the informal and at-risk sectors.

¶5. Incidence: There is not sufficient information to indicate that the incidence of exploitative child labor in the production of coffee, sugar cane, bananas and plantains is significant. Still, continued study and monitoring of the issue is warranted.

¶6. Action: The ILO hopes to fund more studies to collect information on these specific agricultural sectors. Additional information on government and international initiatives is included in the final paragraph.

MINING OF COAL, GOLD, CLAY AND EMERALDS -----

¶7. Type: Exploitative child labor
Source/year of information: Ingeominas (2006), ILO/IPEC Representative in Colombia (2008), MINERCOL (2001), National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE - 2005)

¶8. Ingeominas, a GOC institute that works with the Ministry of Mines and the private sector, reports that 200,000-400,000 children work in the informal sector that surrounds the emerald, gold, clay and coal mining industries. DANE reports 8,735 children work in the mining industry. Obregon says these children primarily work with their families in the artisanal and informal mining sector. She says the DANE numbers are low because they use self-identification to produce these statistics.

¶9. Obregon notes that "almost all" of the production of coal, gold, clay and emeralds comes from the large mining companies, not from the artisanal and informal mining sector. The ILO visited most of the mining companies in Colombia, and found that child labor is not used in the formal sector. Obregon noted that more boys were employed in the mining sector than girls, and that the gold sector is dominated by Afro-Colombian families due to geographical reasons (gold is found in the Afro-Colombian dominated Choco region).

¶10. MINERCOL reports that child labor in small scale mining occurs in the following regions: coal mining principally in the Municipality of Sogamoso Boyaca region, gold mining in the Municipality of Condoto in Choco, clay mining in the Municipality of Nemocon in Cundinamarca, and emerald mining in the municipality of Muzo in Boyaca.

¶11. Incidence: It is clear the incidence of the exploitative child labor is isolated to the informal sector, which accounts for 1-3% of the production of these goods. Therefore, although the amount of exploitative child labor does not merit a "significant" determination, it does merit further study and monitoring in the future. Another issue is that the most recent statistics by mining sector on exploitative child labor are from 2001 -- new data is needed.

¶12. Action: The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Protection, IPEC/ILO, UNICEF, and the Colombian Institute for Children and Families (ICBF) work together vis-a-vis the Joint Strategy to Eliminate all of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in Colombia. Their efforts include after-school programs, work-place inspections, training initiatives, and programs that support school outreach programs to locate children not attending school. The ILO hopes to fund more studies to gather information on these specific agricultural

sectors. The new Department of Labor supported "Educate Me First" program will provide after-school programs for over 10,200 at-risk Colombian children by 2011.

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